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## PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF FUNAAB UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES (PWPDs)

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### ABSTRACT

*The study focused on the perception and attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities. Two hundred and forty students were randomly selected for the study, and questionnaire tagged "PAPPD" was the instrument used for data collection which was administered to the 240 students. Only 227 students that filled and returned their questionnaire were engaged in the study. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.83 using Cronbach Alpha. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical tool and Analysis of variance. Result shows that majority of the students 112 (49.3%) perceived students with physical disabilities as normal people, 107(47.1%) perceived them as friends. The findings also showed that majority 130(57.3%) indicated that they love rendering help to students with physical disabilities because they are also human beings. In general, result showed that there is no significant difference in the perception and attitude of students towards students with physical disabilities irrespective of their ages, colleges and departments. Therefore, awareness programmes such as seminars should be mounted within the University system from time to time so as to enhance positive attitude and perception of undergraduates towards Persons with Physical Disabilities (PWPDs)*

**Keywords:** Perception, Attitude, FUNAAB, Undergraduates, Persons with Physical Disabilities (PWPDs)

### INTRODUCTION

The term Physical Disability (PD) is defined as a condition that interferes with the individual's ability to use his body. Most of these conditions affect the nervous, muscular or skeletal systems and in most cases they have mild, moderate, or severe impact on mobility and motor skills (Ladipo, 2006). Disability as defined under the Equality Act (2010) refers to physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and "long

term" negative effect on the individual's ability to do normal daily activities. Under this Act, one of the following must be affected to a large extent:

- Mobility
- Manual dexterity and
- Physical coordination.

Similarly, World Health Organization (WHO) describes disabilities as impairment in body function or structure, whereby activities are limited and there is difficulty of an

individual executing a task or action. Furthermore, participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of the society in which he/she lives.

The concept of disability has always evolved and will continue to evolve overtime. Generally speaking, PWPDs are still victims of a negative image and social invisibility. They are too often victim of fundamental human right (Munyi, 2012). The message that PWPDs receives about themselves from their environment determines to a large extent their feelings about who they are, what they can do and how they should behave. Community attitudes on the other hand also affect self-perception, and also limit the opportunity of persons with disability to associate with others (Thompson, Fisher, Purcal, Deeming, and Sawrikar, 2011). According to the Center for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) report, people with disabilities are the least cared for and they experienced wide spread discrimination from their families and the Nigeria society in general. Most families in Nigeria, who have a person with disability as a family member are afraid of being ridiculed by their neighbours and the public, therefore they tend to keep the individual with disability indoor and in isolation (Akhidenor, 2007). Akhidenor went further to say that within most ethnic groups in Nigeria; it is generally believed that a person with a disability is as a result of a curse from the gods or through an act of witchcraft.

Okafor (2003) in the same vein opined that persons with physical disabilities in Nigeria are often seen as a disgrace to their families, have a heavy psychological burden due to

social deprivations and coupled with their struggle for economic survival. Therefore, they are often confined to discrete places where they will not readily be noticed.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as reported by Obani, (2007) frequently find their opportunities limited because of social rejection, discriminatory employment practices, architectural barriers and inaccessibility to transport. In this context therefore, the societal attitudes are significant since they largely determine the extent to which the personal, social, educational and psychological needs of persons with disabilities will be realized. Looking at the past and present perceptions towards disability from historical perspective, Munyi (2012) was able to trace majorly the negative perception of people towards persons with disability over five decades down to the recent time. He was able to observe however, that the difference in perception is especially as a result of more understanding of people towards persons with disability and also the recent International and National legislation has cast increasing light on the philosophy of accepting all PWDs in an inclusive setting. In other words, the basic rights of these persons are protected.

Evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2009), showed that attitude of the public towards PWDs vary by impairments. For instance, in a study to compare attitudes of people towards persons with disabilities; 89% were found to be fairly comfortable with persons with physical and sensory impairments when compared with levels of comfort of people interacting with people with learning disabilities.

Also, study done by Vilchinshy (2010) showed that college students had an overall

negative feeling about an encounter with PWDs and that attachment cognitions had little to do with feelings toward disabilities. Some college students also reported being uncomfortable interacting with adults with developmental disabilities (Tervo, 2004). Therefore, Klooster (2009) suggested that college students' attitudes towards this special group could be improved through an increase in educational programs utilizing direct contact such as experiential learning camps. Biklen (1987) and Taylor & Bogdan (1993) in the same vein proposed that a major reason for negative social attitudes resulting in the denial of basic values and rights/conditions is the way disability is portrayed and interpreted in the society. At community level, negative attitudes can become structured into social patterns of segregation and discrimination. For instance, particular social constructions of disability portray people with disabilities as "other" and not as an integral part of the "normal" world.

A national survey of 5,837 middle school students on their attitudes towards the inclusion of their peers with intellectual disabilities (ID) was carried out by Siperstein, Parker, Barden and Wildaman (2007). Finding indicated that youths within the age bracket of 15-30 years have limited contact with ID students in their classrooms and schools. They perceive students with ID as moderately impaired rather than mildly impaired, furthermore, they believe that ID students can participate in non-academic classes but not in academic classes. Furthermore, they view inclusion as having both positive and negative effects and do not want to interact socially with ID peers particularly outside the school.

Ojo (2012) noted that in Nigeria, PWDs are vulnerable and marginalized. They lack enabling environment and this has implication on these individuals realizing their full potentials. Majority of PWDs are not easily accepted by the society even in some families, they are often denied their human rights. In Nigeria, many of the infrastructures and architectural designs in most of our public and private offices, Schools, Colleges, or Universities are not easily accessible to PWDs especially those on wheel chair and crutches.

Ojo (2012) also pointed out that for many years now, PWDs through the joint national Association of persons with Disabilities have been demanding the passage of the National Disability Bill; for the two times this bill had been passed into law, by the National Assembly, unfortunately, the bill had been denied presidential assent on the two occasions. This is unfortunate especially when Nigeria is a signatory to the UN convention on the Right of persons with Disabilities.

Developed world citizens are improving fast in their attitudes and acceptability of PWDs. Some strong Nigerians took a cue from the developed world and begin to see persons with special needs as inseparable part of the society. This would indeed make way for a better perception and attitude towards persons with special needs. This study sought to investigate the perception and attitude of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities.

### Research Questions

1. What is the perception of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities?
2. What is the attitude of FUNAAB

undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities?

3. Which of the Colleges and Departments are more positively disposed to students with physical disabilities in their perception and attitude towards them?

### **Hypotheses:**

HO<sub>1</sub>: (a) There is no significant difference among FUNAAB undergraduates across different age levels in their perception towards students with physical disabilities

HO<sub>1</sub>: (b) There is no significant difference among FUNAAB undergraduates across different age levels in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design to ascertain perception and attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates about students with physical disabilities.

### **Sampling technique/sample size**

Simple random sampling was adopted to select 5 out of 9 colleges in the University. Two hundred and forty students were also randomly selected but only 227 students correctly filled and returned their questionnaires across the departments. Hence, 227 students participated in the study.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used in collecting data was the questionnaire. This was in two sections. Section A was on demographic data such as age. The section also asked for the various colleges and departments within the colleges. Section B had 14 item questions that elicited the perception and attitude of the

respondents towards students with physical disabilities. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.83 using Cronbach Alpha.

### **Procedure for administering the instrument.**

The services of 3 post graduate students of FUNAAB were employed in administering the questionnaires in the different colleges. This was done within 2 weeks; and 227 out of 240 questionnaires were duly filled and retrieved.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis of simple percentages and Analysis of Variance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results are discussed in line with the stated research questions

Research question 1 sought to ascertain FUNAAB undergraduates perception about students with physical disabilities.

As stated above, undergraduates indicated that they perceive students with physical disabilities as normal people (mean = 4.06) as well as friends (mean = 3.87). However, they disagreed that students with physical disabilities are strange human beings (mean = 2.59). Therefore, FUNAAB undergraduates do have positive perception about students with physical disabilities. The weighted average is 3.51 which also indicated that the perception is positive.

Research question 2 is about determining FUNAAB undergraduates' attitude towards students with physical disabilities

Table 1: **Perception of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities**

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	N	Mean	Std. D
1.	I perceive students with physical disabilities as strange human beings	8 (3.5)	7 (3.1)	128 (56.4)	80 (35.2)	4 (1.8)	2.59	0.76
2.	I perceive students with physical disabilities as normal people	100 (44.1)	112 (49.3)	7 (3.1)	3 (1.3)	5 (2.2)	4.06	1.15
3.	I perceive students with physical disabilities as my friend	69 (30.4)	107 (47.1)	16 (7.0)	15 (6.6)	18 (7.9)	3.87	1.28
4.	Weighted average	3.51						

Table 2: **Attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities**

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std.D
1	I relate with students with physical disability the same way I relate with others without	69 (30.4)	107 (47.1)	16 (7.0)	15 (6.6)	18 (7.9)	4.00	1.13
2	I hate to relate with students with physical disabilities, I just cannot stand them.	6 (2.6)	2 (.9)	149 (65.6)	65 (28.6)	5 (2.2)	2.73	.65
3	I do not want to associate myself with students with physical disabilities because of the social stigma	3 (1.3)	5 (2.2)	120 (52.9)	94 (41.4)	5 (2.2)	2.59	.64
4	I do not want to contract the disability hence I distant myself from the students	6 (2.6)	1 (.4)	123 (54.2)	85 (37.4)	4 (1.8)	2.53	.81
5	I simply hate students with physical disability on campus because they seem to have a way of drawing the lecturer's attention to themselves alone.	8 (3.5)	7 (3.1)	128 (56.4)	80 (35.2)	4 (1.8)	2.71	.72
6	I would not want to be in the same tutorial group with students with physical disabilities because I cannot be challenged academically	6 (2.6)	2 (.9)	149 (65.6)	65 (28.6)	5 (2.2)	2.73	.65
7	I like students with physical disabilities quite well because they are very friendly	69 (30.4)	107 (47.1)	16 (7.0)	15 (6.6)	18 (7.9)	3.83	1.21
8	I am very friendly with students with physical disabilities because I do not want them to have low self concept	59 (26.0)	133 (58.6)	12 (5.3)	11 (4.8)	12 (5.3)	3.95	.99
9	I always want to see students with physical disabilities comfortable hence, I am very close to them	100 (44.1)	112 (49.3)	7 (3.1)	3 (1.3)	5 (2.2)	4.32	.79
10	I love rendering help/assistance to students with physical disabilities because they are human being like me.	130 (57.3)	76 (33.5)	7 (3.1)	1 (.4)	13 (5.7)	4.36	1.01
11	I relate well without any reservation with students with physical disabilities because their disability is not their own making	108 (47.6)	83 (36.6)	24 (10.6)	7 (3.1)	5 (2.2)	4.24	.92
	Weighted average	3.45						

Table 2 shows that the undergraduates agreed that (i) they relate well with students with physical disabilities as they relate with those without (mean=4.00), (ii) they like students with physical disabilities in their class without discrimination (mean=3.83), (iii) they are very friendly with students with physical disabilities because they want them to feel belong always (mean=3.95) (iv) they always want to see students with physical disabilities comfortable (mean = 4.32) (v) they love to render to students with physical disabilities because they are also human beings (mean=4.36) that they relate well without any reservation because their disability is not their making (mean = 4.24). However, they disagreed with the following statements: (i) they hate to relate with students with physical disabilities (mean

=2.73), (ii) they do not want to associate themselves with students with physical disabilities (mean= 2.59), (iii) they distant themselves so as not to contract the disability (mean=2.53) (iv) they simply hate students with physical disabilities (mean=2.71) and that they would not want to be in the same tutorial group with them (mean=2.73).

These findings imply that FUNAAB undergraduates have positive attitude towards students with physical disabilities. The weighted average of 3.45 also indicates that the attitude is positive.

Research question 3 is about knowing which of the colleges and departments are more positively inclined in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities.

**Table 3(a):** Attitude towards students with physical disabilities across colleges

Colleges	N	Mean	Std.D	df	F	Sig	Remark
COLANIM	27	61.48	5.42				
COLAMRUD	29	59.00	5.88				
COLNAS	76	59.08	5.97	4,222	1.714	.148	Not significant
COPLANT	49	59.10	4.36				
COLFHEC	46	58.02	5.51				
Total	227	59.15	5.52				

Table 3 (a) revealed that there is no significant difference among students from various colleges in their attitude towards persons with disabilities ( $F_{(4, 222)} = 1.714$ ;  $P > 0.05$ ). This implies that the colleges have no influence on the attitudes of the students towards persons with disabilities.

Table 3(b) revealed that there is no significant difference among students from various departments in their attitude towards persons with disabilities ( $F_{(12,213)} = 1.36$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). This implies that departments (field of study) have no influence on stu-

dents' attitude towards persons with disabilities.

$H_{01(a)}$ : There is no significant difference between FUNAAB undergraduate students across age levels in their perception towards students with physical disabilities

Table 4(a) Shows that there is no significant differences in age among the undergraduate students in their perception towards students with physical disabilities ( $F_{(3,223)} = 0.243$ ;  $P > 0.05$  Therefore,  $H_{01}$  is not rejected.

HO<sub>1 (b)</sub>: There is no significant difference among FUNAAB undergraduate students across different age levels in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities

Table 4(b) shows there is no significant difference among the undergraduate students across different age levels in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities.

**Table 3(b):** Attitude towards students with physical disabilities across departments.

Depts.	N	mean	Std.D	Df	F	Sig.	Remark
ANN	24	61.33	4.91				
AEFM	27	58.63	5.96				
BIO-CHEM	29	59.76	6.52				
SS and LM	22	58.36	6.14				
Soil Science	3	57.67	1.15				
CPT	5	55.40	6.91	12,213	1.358	.182	Not Signifi- cant
Physics	27	58.00	5.44				
Horticulture	20	60.95	2.39				
AERD	4	59.66	2.14				
NUD	29	57.00	5.59				
CSC	16	59.88	6.13				
MTS	5	62.20	6.26				
HSM	16	60.06	3.60				
Total	227	59.15	5.52				

**Table 4a:** Summary of Analysis of Variance

Age group	N	Mean	Std.D	F	Df	Sig	Remark
15-20	9	10.00	2.34				Not signifi- cant
20-25	163	10.56	2.07	0.243	3,223	0.866	
25 and above	51	10.55	1.92				
No indication	4	10.25	1.50				
Total	227	10.53	2.03				

P<0.05 level of significance

Age Group	N	Mean	Std. D	F	Df	Sig	Remark
15-20	9	44.75	5.23				Not Signifi- cant
20-25	163	44.89	6.70	0.145	3,223	0.933	
25 and above	51	43.57	6.77				
No in- dication	4	44.75	6.61				
Total	227	43.67	4.50				

P<0.05 level of significance

## DISCUSSION

The study investigated the perception and attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities. The first research question probed into the perception of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities. This response may be due to the fact that the percentage of students with physical disabilities is almost insignificant compared with the entire student population. As a result, many of them might not have close interaction or with them especially since they are not in the same learning environment. However, this response is encouraging. This means that persons with disabilities nowadays are being perceived foremost as human beings rather than viewing them negatively as the society use to do in the past. This is in agreement with the findings of Munyi (2012) who traced improvement in perception of people towards persons with disabilities over five decades down to the recent time. He also found out that the difference in perception now is as a result of more understanding of the society towards persons with disability as against what obtained a few decades ago.

Research question 2 investigated the attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities. Again, it was interesting to note from the findings that FUNAAB undergraduates are well disposed in their attitude towards their peers with physical disabilities (Table 2). This might probably be that they have come to terms with the fact that these categories of people are human beings like them, more so they are also students in the same University.

Evidence from the British Social Attitude Survey (2009) supports the above finding

that the attitude of people towards persons with disability varies by impairments. The British Social Attitude Survey (2009) has indicated that people are fairly comfortable with persons with physical and sensory impairments than those with intellectual disabilities.

Research questions 3 stated "which of the colleges and departments are more positively disposed in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities?" Findings in this study showed that there is no significant difference between the students across the various colleges and departments in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities (Tables 3a and 3b)

This implies that students usually belong to various fields of study. As a result, neither the colleges nor the departments have any influence on students attitude towards their colleagues who have physical disabilities.

HO<sub>1(a)</sub>: States 'There is no significant difference between FUNAAB Undergraduates across age levels in their perception towards students with physical disabilities'. Findings in this study revealed that age was not a determinant of perception of undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities. In other words, all the age groups perceive children with physical disabilities the same way.

HO<sub>1(b)</sub>: States "there is no significant difference among FUNAAB undergraduates across different age levels in their attitude towards students with physical disabilities". Again, from the findings in this study, there was no significant difference across age levels in their attitude. It could be deduced that probably the undergraduate students have had contact with students with physical disabilities at one point in time from one hundred levels through 400-500 levels; when



they were relatively young 15-20 through age 25 and above. Hence, their perception and attitudes have been formed ever since then.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results show a positive perception and attitude of FUNAAB undergraduates towards students with physical disabilities irrespective of their ages, Colleges and Departments. Awareness programmes such as seminars should therefore be mounted within the University system from time to time so as to enhance positive attitude and perception of undergraduates towards Persons with Physical Disabilities (PWPDs)

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